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Heritage and tourism park to be built in Metepenagiag (05/08/31)

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METEPENAGIAG (CNB) - Metepenagiag Heritage Park, a world-class cultural tourism facility, will be constructed in Metepenagiag, thanks to a partnership between the Metepenagiag Mi'kmaq Nation, the Province of New Brunswick and the Government of Canada.

(*Multimedia*)

The funding announcement was made today by Premier Bernard Lord, Minister responsible for Aboriginal Affairs Brad Green, Chief Noah Augustine of the Metepenagiag Mi'kmaq Nation, Miramichi MP Charles Hubbard and Andy Scott, who is Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians.

"As an important building block of *Greater Opportunity: New Brunswick's Prosperity Plan*, building strategic infrastructure is important for economic growth in every region of New Brunswick," Lord said. "The contribution affirms our commitment to invest in key infrastructure that improves the quality of life for New Brunswickers and attracts new investment to the province."

The park will preserve, protect and present the national significance of Augustine Mound and Oxbow National Historic Sites of Canada - two of the most significant aboriginal heritage archaeological sites in Eastern Canada. The sites demonstrate that Metepenagiag (Red Bank) is the oldest, continuously occupied village in New Brunswick, dating back almost 3,000 years. They also illustrate wide ranging aboriginal trading networks, which stretched from Atlantic Canada into the Great Lakes and along the eastern seaboard as far as the Ohio Valley.

Scott said the sites' rich histories paint a fascinating picture of how the Mi'kmaq lived many centuries before contact with Europeans.

"Recognizing the cultural and historical value of these sites and the tourism potential they hold, the Government of Canada is doing its part to enable the success of this world-class heritage park," Scott said. "We are proud partners of the Metepenagiag Mi'kmaq Nation and the Province of New Brunswick."

The park will also bring an economic boost to the local economy. It is expected to attract upwards of 25,000 visitors annually.

"Metepenagiag Heritage Park will draw visitors from all over the world to the Miramichi region. It is a place where New Brunswickers can celebrate and learn about First Nations people that have lived here during the past 3,000 years," Lord said.

Visitors will experience Mi'kmaq history and culture through a series of evocative, engaging, and entertaining thematic settings and media. The 1,300-square-metre interpretation centre will include a main reception hall, theme exhibits that

will provide a variety of two- and three-dimensional settings, audio-visual productions, computer interactive programs and oral history recordings.

There will also be a multimedia theatre featuring a 20-minute production presented in a "forest-like" surround setting that will include multiple-screen panoramic projections, "virtual" historical figures and evocative soundscapes. Visitors will also be able to observe the Oxbow National Historic Site of Canada from an exterior viewing deck. The numerous walking trails that will run through the park will enhance the visit by providing visitors with an opportunity to experience the beauty of the Metepenagiag landscape.

"The Mi'kmaq heritage is deeply ingrained in the history of New Brunswick, especially in the Miramichi area, and this park will ensure our ancestors' stories are passed on for years to come," said Madeline Augustine, president of Metepenagiag Heritage Park. "Aside from being presented in both official languages, the exhibits and interpretations will be done in Mi'kmaq, which means our language will survive and so will our culture."

"For centuries, other people and other nations have tried at varying levels of success and failure to interpret the culture and heritage of our Mi'kmaq nation," Chief Noah Augustine said. "This is our story. This is our experience. It is authentic and true to the spirit of our Mi'kmaq nation and above all, it will be done with class and respect for our ancestors and generations to come."

Construction on the park will begin in the spring of 2006, and is expected to be completed by May 2007.

The Province of New Brunswick is contributing $1 million to the project and the Metepenagiag Mi'kmaq Nation is contributing $500,000.

The Government of Canada is investing a total of $7.1 million towards this initiative. Funding was provided by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development ($2 million), the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency ($2 million), the Department of Canadian Heritage ($1.6 million) and the Parks Canada Agency ($1.5 million).

Of these amounts, $6.6 million will go towards the construction of the Metepenagiag Heritage Park. The remaining $2 million funding commitment, over 10 years, will go towards operational funding.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Following is a fact sheet about Metepenagiag Heritage Park. MEDIA CONTACTS: Gary Toft, communications, Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat; 506-453-6543; Bruce Macfarlane, Regional Development Corp., 506-453-2277; Chisholm Pothier, Office of the Premier, 506-444-2286; Valérie Poulin, director of communications, Office of Joseph McGuire, Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, 613-941-7241; Patrick Lacroix, communications director, ACOA NB, 506-452-3113; Jean-François Del Torchio, press secretary, Office of the Minister of Canadian Heritage and minister responsible for the Status of Women, 819-997-7788; Claude DeGrâce, senior adviser, Historic Sites Northern New Brunswick Field Unit, Parks Canada, 506-851-3084; Debbi Ackles-Adams, manager of communications, INAC Atlantic, 902-661-6372; Pam Ward, executive director, Metepenagiag Heritage Park Inc., 506-836-6118.

Metepenagiag Heritage Park - fact sheet

·Metepenagiag is the traditional Mi'kmaq name for the Indigenous First Nation, formerly known as Red Bank, located at the confluence of the Little Southwest Miramichi River in northeastern New Brunswick and is recognized as the province's longest continuously occupied village.

·Since 1975, more than 100 archaeological sites have been discovered in the Red Bank area. The park will preserve, protect and present the national significance of Augustine Mound and Oxbow National Historic Sites of Canada - two of the most significant aboriginal heritage archaeological sites in Eastern Canada.

·These two sites were designated as nationally significant in 1975 and 1982 by the National Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada and received provincial designation in 1991 as a result of a long-standing relationship with the Archaelogical Services Unit of New Brunswick.

·Joseph Augustine, the Metepenagiag Elder who first recognized the cultural and historical value of these sites, received New Brunswick's distinguished Award for Heritage in 1988.

·The park's integrated management plan will ensure the protection and preservation of these two valuable cultural resources for generations to come and guide in their presentation to the public.

·The presentation of these sites brings together two bodies of knowledge: the western science of archeology and the traditional orally transmitted culture of the Mi'kmaq people of Metepenagiag.

·Metepenagiag Heritage Park is a $6.6-million, world-class cultural tourism facility expected to boost the local economy by attracting upwards of 25,000 visitors annually.

·The new facilities will be owned and operated by the Metepenagiag Heritage Park Inc., (MHPI), a non-profit body incorporated and created by resolution of chief and council. MHPI is under the direction of a board of directors consisting of broad and diverse community representation.

·Community involvement plays an important part in the development of the Heritage Park. In addition to an active elders council, three working committees focused on social impacts, heritage presentation and fundraising are made up of community members who are responsible for guiding the park's implementation.

·Capital funding for the park is provided by:

Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development - $2 million

Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency - $2 million

Department of Canadian Heritage - $1.6 million

Province of New Brunswick - $1 million

·Operational funding for the heritage park will be provided by Parks Canada ($1.5-million) and the Metepenagiag Mi'kmaq Nation ($500,000) over a 10-year period.

·The Visitor and Interpretation Centre, a 1,300-square-metre, state-of-the-art building will be built within the natural forest surroundings along the banks of the Little Southwest Miramichi River. Outdoor viewing areas will provide impressive views of the Oxbow and a trail network will meander through the wooded areas and along the river.

·This project gathers together many interested individuals and required technical assistance, including a Senior Parks Canada Interpretation specialist who is on a two-year assignment with MHPI directing the development of the heritage presentation and a professional engineer with many years experience in project management hired to oversee the architectural and engineering services.

·Today, the Mi'kmaq population of Metepenagiag is nearing 600. It is an enduring Indigenous First Nation community that continues to grow and develop.

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